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ABSTRACT

The Houston (Texas) Independent School District's teacher induction program utilizes the services of both mentors and teacher scholars. The mentors provide a variety of support services for the inductees at the building level, focusing on the pedagogical, emotional, and social adjustment needs of the inductees. The mentors receive a total of 12 hours of training during the school year. The teacher scholars provide demonstration lessons, coteaching sessions, and a variety of support services for inductees. With their extensive teaching backgrounds and familiarity with the various content areas, the scholars also represent a critical alternative source of instructional support for the inductees. The scholars act as the liaisons between inductees and mentors, especially in dysfunctional situations where personalities or instructional philosophies differ. This report describes: (1) the program as implemented in the 1988-89 school year; (2) the effectiveness of the program implementation; and (3) the effectiveness of the program in achieving the program goals. (JD)

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The Teacher Induction Program
1988–1989

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AN EVALUATION OF HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT'S TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAM, 1988-1989

The Teacher Induction Program was implemented as a multiple support system to ease the adjustment of beginning teachers to the District's instructional culture thereby enhancing their teaching effectiveness, self-confidence, morale, and finally increase the District's retention of these teachers. This evaluation examines the effectiveness of the program's implementation process and the effectiveness of the program in achieving program goals. It also synthesizes the various recommendations for program improvement. Overall, the program was instrumental in improving inductee teaching effectiveness, morale, self-confidence, and adjustment to the instructional culture of the District.

The Teacher Induction Program was implemented in HISD during the 1988-89 school year as a pilot for the statewide teacher induction program that is scheduled to begin in 1991. The goals of the District's Teacher Induction Program were: (1) to ease the transition of beginning teachers from student status to that of competent and self-confident professionals; (2) to increase the retention of promising beginning teachers; and (3) to familiarize the teachers with the District's instructional resources and culture. The District initiated the program under the provisions of the Texas Senate Bill 994 (Sec. 12.038), which stipulates that:

> *(a) The State Board of Education and the Coordinating Board, Texas College and University system, shall develop a comprehensive Teaching Induction Program for the probationary year;*
>
> *(b) The Induction Program shall include a one year period of teaching, cooperatively supervised by experienced teachers, school administrators, and faculty of institutions of Higher Education.*

The full implementation of the Texas Senate Bill in December of 1991 will require that teaching certification or licensing be directly linked to a successful completion of the induction and probationary year by all graduates from Texas public institutions of higher education, who wish to enter teaching at the primary and secondary levels. Furthermore, the Texas Senate Bill states that the institutions will be required to have in place undergraduate teacher training programs offering no more than eighteen credit hours in education, including student-teaching.

MOTIVATION FOR THE PROGRAM

The 1980's have been characterized by a national preoccupation with many educational issues, especially the problems which have seemingly resulted in a dysfunctional grip on the effectiveness of our schools. Numerous concerned citizens, educators, private organizations, as well as federal and state departments of education have consequently called for pertinent educational reforms to address these issues (Sizer, 1983; Orlich, 1989).

Teacher training and certification have lately been on the reform agendas of many states. A research study by Barger in 1986 found that seventeen states had teacher induction programs in the piloting or implementation stages, while fourteen states had programs in the study/planning/development stages. Fourteen of the seventeen states with induction programs at that time indicated that their programs were linked to certification or licensing; however, twenty states had no teacher induction programs or had no current plans for such programs (Barger, 1986).

According to a recent report (Henry, 1988), national statistics show that the percentage of entry level teachers who leave teaching after the first year is 13%. One can safely surmise that the major urban school districts—known to be the most difficult areas to teach—would have the highest non-retention rates of first year teachers who leave teaching, or transfer to other school districts. Among the many reasons which have led to the flight of these inexperienced first year teachers is their inability to cope with the instructional culture of the big school districts, characterized by high proportions of disadvantaged students from low socio-economic families, non-English speaking families, and lacking in motivation. The implementation of the Teacher Induction Program in HISD was, therefore, a highly pertinent multi-purpose strategy for not only strenthening the instructional quality in the District but also for curbing the resignation rate of promising first year teachers who enter District employment every year.

HISD'S TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAM

For the 1988-89 school year, 366 entry level teachers (inductees) participated in HISD's Teacher Induction program. The inductees were paired with an equal number of experienced teachers (mentors) in their respective schools. The program had six teacher scholars until December 1988, when one of the scholars accepted a principalship position in HISD. The inductees of that teacher scholar were, therefore, temporary reassigned to the remaining five scholars. In March of 1989, another teacher scholar was hired to work with those inductees. According to the Director of the program, the departure of the scholar in December of 1988 resulted in a situation where several inductees had to be serially assigned to three scholars during the course of one school year. About seventy inductees were assigned to each of the six teacher scholars in the program. The support staff included the building level principals of the inductees, two professors from the University of Houston, and a statewide advisory/review group of professors from the following Universities: Corpus Christi State University, University of Texas (San

Antonio), East Texas State University, and the University of Houston. Consultants to the mentors included one member of the State Teacher Induction Committee, two faculty members from the South West Texas State University, and another faculty member from the University of New Mexico.

The program was coordinated and overseen by the HISD director of District-University Relations. The mentors provided a variety of support services for the inductees at the building level, which focused on the pedagogical, emotional, and social adjustment needs of the inductees. The teacher scholars provided demonstration lessons, co-teaching sessions, and a variety of support services for their inductees. With their extensive teaching backgrounds and familiarity with the various content areas, the scholars also represented a critical alternative source of instructional support for the inductees. The scholars acted as the liaison persons between the inductees and the mentors, especially in dysfunctional situations where personalities or instructional philosophies differed between the mentor and the inductee. Inductees who felt uncomfortable about asking for certain kinds of support from their mentors could always obtain the support from their assigned scholars. The members of the advisory committee made periodic visits to the District, surveyed samples of inductees, mentors, and other program staff, and later provided the program director with an evaluative report on the program.

The mentors received a total of twelve hours of training during the school year. Besides the many training sessions the scholars received from the program director, the teacher scholars also took a three hour graduate seminar at the University of Houston during the fall of 1988. The seminar focused on several instructional areas such as teacher induction models in other states, problem solving in instruction, communication skills, classroom management and discipline, problems in first year teaching, and strategies for improving student attitudes and behavior. The inductees participated in a year long series of seven six-hour workshops, which occurred on Saturdays. Each inductee who attended a minimum of five workshops during the school year could receive three hours of graduate credit by the University of Houston if the inductee enrolled in a degree program at the University. Approximately 34% of the inductees registered for the graduate credits. The inductee inservices addressed several facets of instruction such as lesson planning, classroom management, the affective needs of students, instructional strategies, stress management, instructional materials, problem-solving in instruction, student motivation, student learning styles, and parental role in instruction.

EVALUATION DESIGN

This report describes: (1) the program as implemented in the 1988-89 school year; (2) the effectiveness of program implementation; and (3) the effectiveness of the program in achieving the enumerated program goals. Owing to the pilot nature of the program and the fact that it is on the basis of such a formative report that the program can be strengthened to attain its optimum degree of effectiveness, this report concentrates on the feedback from the main program participants, namely: the inductees, mentors, University faculty, and the program director.

Data for this report were collected in May of 1989, from: (1) the inductees and their mentors through a questionnaire-survey; (2) all of the teacher scholars through informal and unstructured interviews; and (3) members of the advisory committee through their visitation reports. The observations and recommendations of the program director have also been incorporated into this report.

The survey return rate for the inductees was 24% (87/360), while that of the mentors was 29% (106/360). Even though the survey return rates can be perceived as leaving too much room for possible bias errors, the extremely high correlation among the perceptions of the inductees, mentors, teacher scholars, and members of the advisory committee provides a concurrent and convergent validation of the reported findings.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION: GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Being the sole recipients of the multi-faceted program resources and opportunities, the inductees were requested to evaluate the following aspects of the program: (a) the implementation of the various program components; and (b) the effectiveness of the program in easing their transition from student status to competent, self-confident classroom teachers with the desire to continue their teaching careers in the District.

MAJOR IMPLEMENTATION COMPONENTS

Induction Workshops

Many aspects of the workshops were evaluated by the inductees. They included the topical content, methods of presentation, duration, day of the week, and frequency of the workshops. The following is a summary of inductee assessments of the workshops:

- 68%—70% of the inductees who responded to the survey indicated that they were satisfied with the topical content, methods of presentation, and frequency of the workshops;

- 60% of the inductees expressed that they were satisfied with the scheduling of the workshops on Saturdays.

- Of all the workshop aspects, the one that was viewed with dissatisfaction by the largest number of the survey respondents (22%) was the 6-hour length of the Saturday workshops.

- 20% of the inductee comments on the workshops indicated that the topics were good but not always effectively presented. A few of the comments indicated that

the lack of more hands-on demonstration type of presentations made a number of the workshops boring and time wasting.

- 30% of the inductee comments on the workshops indicated a dissatisfaction with the high number of the Saturday workshops. In the words of one dissatisfied inductee *"I found it to be a very long week, with an all day workshop on Saturday. I needed my time on the week-end to 'gear up' for the next week."*

- 15% of the comments indicated that the "Job-Alike" component of the workshops were too long, a waste of time, boring, or served as "gripe" sessions that cast a negative shadow over the general positive nature of the workshops. On the other hand, another 15% of the workshop-related comments expressed that the "Job-Alike" sessions were very informative and served as problem solving forums for sharing ideas and familiarizing oneself with District policies. The "Job-Alike" component was, however, the sessions which involved inductees who taught in the same content area in the secondary schools or taught at the same grade level in the elementary schools. The purpose of such sessions was to provide a forum for the discussion of common instructional problems.

Mentor Support

Five of the inductees, who commented on their mentors, indicated that their mentors were very supportive and caring. In the words of one inductee, *"My mentor was outstanding. She never hesitated to offer me support and I always felt comfortable going to her."*

Twelve of the inductees who responded to the survey expressed that their mentors provided little support for them. Reasons given for lack of support were many, of which the following are a representative sample: "mentor complained that she was drafted"; "mentors taught full-time with very little time to help the inductee"; "mentor was not professional by treating the inductee in a condescending manner"; "mentor taught at a different grade level, or in another content area"; "mentor's classroom was not geographically in close proximity"; "mentor was seemingly interested only in the stipend, or probably did not care."

Scholar Support

Five of the inductees who gave comments on the teacher scholar's role were very positive about it, and described their scholars with words such as: *"super,"* *"exceptionally helpful,"* and *"had great ideas, suggestions, etc."*

Four inductees indicated a dissatisfaction with how the scholars operated. One inductee remarked that her scholars changed too frequently while another inductee was unhappy about her scholar not knowing much about her content area (i.e., Special Ed.) to

be able to offer adequate help. Two inductees expressed disappointment over the fact that they saw their scholars once or twice for a few minutes during the entire year. The impression of two inductees was that "*the scholar had very little time to spend with us if we weren't having major difficulty.*" One of these inductees indicated that she would have liked to have had more time and input from such an "outside source" of support.

One observation that was made by both inductees and three members of the advisory committee was the apparent lack of well-defined guidelines on responsibilities and role expectations of the mentors, the building level administrators, and how they relate to those of the scholars. One member of the University faculty advisory committee, for example, observed during his visit to the District that "*Although some administrators had a good grasp of the purpose of the program and their role, most evidenced a general lack of knowledge concerning each of these areas.*"

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

In spite of the perceived problems and weaknesses of the program, several aspects of the program were deemed by most of the inductees—through the questionnaire—as major program strengths. When ranked according to the degree of frequency with which each program strength was mentioned by the inductees, the following emerged at the top:

- The *workshops provided a sharing forum* and an opportunity for inductees to meet, which helped to remind each inductee that others too were experiencing similar frustrations and that they were not alone in their plight. One important spin-off from the sharing forums was the opportunity for *peer contact* and the establishment of friends throughout the District, which facilitated easier social adjustment to such a big district;

- The *assurance that there was help* if one ever needed it made many inductees feel wanted and needed by the District. This feeling instilled in them the belief that someone cared about their frustrations and their well-being;

- Most inductees indicated that they could always count on the *support provided by the teacher scholar*. To some of them the mere availability of the scholar as an alternative source of support and as someone who could lend a listening ear to their problems was satisfying and assuring. In the words of one high school inductee, it was satisfying *"to know that someone is there for you. In a big school it's easy to get lost. My teacher scholar was always a phone call away;"*

- Finally, a major perceived strength of the program was the *support provided by the mentors,* which many believed was very critical to their success.

Other aspects mentioned included the *support provided by their principals* and the *stipend* given to the inductees for participation in the workshops.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Overall, the workshops were assessed by most of the inductees, who responded to the survey, as effective in helping them adjust to the instructional expectations of the District. The following is a summary of their assessments:

- 50% of the inductees evaluated the workshops as effective, while 11% assessed them as ineffective, with 26% rating them as somewhat effective;

- 70% of the inductees indicated that the emotional support they received from their *scholars* was effective, while 62% of the inductees indicated that the emotional support provided by their *mentors* was effective;

- 51% of the inductees rated the instructional support they received from their mentors as effective; over 64% rated the scholar support as effective. The proportions of the inductees who evaluated the mentor and scholar instructional support as ineffective were 21% and 16% respectively;

- 63% of the inductees indicated that the program was effective in increasing their self-confidence as effective classroom teachers, while 22% assessed it as somewhat effective; 13%, however, indicated that the program was not effective in improving their self-confidence as effective classroom teachers;

- 52% of the inductees assessed the program as effective in making them "feel good" about teaching in the District; 14%, however, assessed the program as ineffective in improving their morale;

- While 53% of the inductees strongly expressed the desire to stay within the District, 17% indicated that they would like to leave; 21% of the inductees, however, indicated that they felt somewhat uncertain about leaving. Twenty-one of the inductees who expressed the desire to leave, or were not sure about leaving, gave several reasons, which included the following: excessive rules and "red tape," too much paperwork, assignment to very difficult classrooms, teacher salaries lagging behind other comparatively sized school districts, very little support from their building administrators, wanting to reduce their daily commuting distances, and personal reasons.

Overall, however, the following words of one inductee succinctly summarizes and captures the positive and effectiveness aspects of the program:

> *"HISD is an exciting district. I would hate to leave. Most people have been so supportive. Dr. Raymond appears to be in the teacher's corner. I really*

feel comfortable in that I have so many 'support people'. If I have a question there is an answer—with a smile. It is a team approach. There is always someone nearby to help and encourage you. Most of the topics at the Saturday sessions were relevant . I personally came away from each one with a good feeling about myself and a feeling that no matter what happened somebody cared about my frustrations. I never felt alone. I feel that this program has helped me grow as a person, as well as a teacher. Even though I had taught before, I was very apprehensive in a new district."

In view of the pilot nature of the program, and the fact that the state-wide teacher induction program will be used for licensing entry level teachers, the inductees were asked to reflect on their induction year experience and comment on the proposal to link the induction year to certification. Sixty-three percent of the inductees who responded to the question (36/57) felt it would be a bad policy which may turn off prospective teachers from other states. Several reasons were given. The most mentioned was that since competent, dedicated and professionally mature principals and mentors cannot be always provided for the inductee, many entry level teachers may have their teaching careers jeopardized through such a certification process. Furthermore, it may negate the positive intentions of the entire program. In the words of one inductee who complained that the induction staff would operate more as assessors than helpers: "*It is difficult to admit a problem and ask for help from someone who is assessing you and might interpret your problems as weaknesses.*" Several inductees, therefore, emphasized that if the policy is to be implemented as has been proposed, then there should be some built-in checks and balances for protecting the inductees from mentors and administrators whose personalities and philosophies may conflict with those of the inductees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As with most pilot programs and formative evaluations, the effective and efficient achievement of program goals and objectives make it imperative that program staff provide pertinent feedback to facilitate the improvement of the program. Based on the weaknesses perceived by the program staff, several recommendations were proposed by various participants in the teacher induction program. The following were the most mentioned by the mentors, inductees, scholars, and the advisory committee members:

Selection of Mentors

Mentor selection should be thorough to provide willing and non-drafted mentors who have personalities compatible with those of their inductees. The mentors should teach at the same grade levels at the elementary level, or in the same content area at the secondary level. The classrooms of the mentors should be geographically in close proximity to those of their respective inductees.

Qualities the inductees recommended for the selection of their mentors included the following: warm, confident, inspiring, sensitive, positive minded, sincere, empathetic, competent, easy to talk to, excellent sense of humor, know the District well, professionals with non-prejudiced attitude, and genuinely care for the well-being and success of the inductees. Two inductees suggested that the mentors should have an average of 4-5 years experience to enable them to remember how it feels to experience the first year of teaching. One advisory committee member suggested that ways should be found for handling situations of mentor-inductee conflicts of incompatibility. It was suggested by one teacher scholar that the mentors should be selected by the end of the spring semester so that they can have their training in the summer before the school year starts.

Topics and Presentation of Inductee Workshops

Thirteen inductees suggested that there should be a close review of the inservice topics to help provide a list of only the relevant and less boring topics. More concrete and hands-on presentations involving small groups of between 25 and 30 inductees are recommended. Four inductees requested that the program organizers seek their input in selecting topics for workshops rather than depend solely on what the "experts" deem relevant for the inductees. One mentor, one advisory committee member, and two inductees indicated a need for workshops which address the needs of teachers of outlying content areas such as music and physical education. Seven mentors and an advisory committee member suggested that inductees be given much support during the first few weeks of the school year regarding deadlines for paperwork, procedural expectations such as grading, setting up grade books, promotions, and discipline processes.

Frequency and Duration of Workshops

Twelve inductees, one mentor and two of the four advisory committee members suggested that the number and duration of workshops should be reduced. One advisory committee member recommended the elimination of the Saturday workshops. Most of the program staff surveyed suggested four-hour Saturday workshops. A couple of teacher scholars stated that the best alternative to the Saturday sessions would be the provision of a minimum of three inductee workshops during the week with release time for the teachers that can be covered by a pool of teacher aides or substitutes. One scholar felt that the District should provide well organized retreats for small groups of inductees at a time. According to the scholar such retreats would provide a more relaxed and effective setting for the inductee workshops.

Workload of Teacher Scholars

Five inductees, one mentor, most of the scholars, and one member of the advisory committee recommended that the number of inductees assigned to each scholar should be

reduced from the current 60-70 to no more than 50. This will make it possible for the scholars to have more meaningful contacts with the inductees.

Mentor-Inductee Workshops

Thirty seven mentors, two inductees, one advisory committee member, and most of the scholars suggested that the mentors and scholars should attend some of the workshops together so that certain basic general perspectives and expectations would be known by all. Furthermore, the first workshops should be attended by both groups. It was also expressed that the inductees should be introduced to their respective mentors prior to the start of the school year. Such an effort will help the inductees to prepare more effectively for the first few weeks of school.

Mentor-Inductee Class Observations

Twenty six mentors one advisory committee member, and the scholars indicated that the District should provide regular free time for the mentor and the inductee to observe each other's teaching. Some mentors suggested the provision of relief aides or substitutes, especially during the first few weeks of the school year, when the inductees need the most support, whether instructional, social, or emotional. Many suggested that both the mentor and the inductee should have the same planning periods.

Principal Support and Training

The teacher scholars suggested that the principals should have a summer workshop to discuss their critical role in the program. They should help the inductee by a) not assigning them to the most difficult classrooms; b) providing coverage for inductees to observe their mentors and vice versa; c) being objective and fair in selecting the most compatible mentors for their inductees; and d) ensuring that the inductees have the most conducive, emotionally supportive setting for effective adjustment to the school, staff, instructional process, and the District.

Program Organizational Guidelines

Three of the four advisory committee members expressed a strong need for written guidelines specifying the various role expectations of each of the program staff. In the view of one committee member, *"It may be necessary to further structure the roles of each participant and to insure that each member of the role set clearly understands the roles of other members as well as their own responsibilities."*

Several other recommendations were made by one to five member(s) of the program staff. The following is a brief list of such recommendations:

- Inductees should be given more workshops on discipline management;
- Program guidelines and expectations should be clearly communicated to the program staff prior to the beginning of the school year;
- Three inductees suggested that the District should keep promises made to the program staff regarding stipends;
- Five inductees recommended that the "Job-Alike" sessions should not be turned into "gripe" sessions since they tend to dampen the positive spirit of other inductees;
- Three inductees requested for the discontinuation of the afternoon workshop sessions;
- Provide adequate supply of snacks on Saturday workshops;
- Provide extra and special "catch-up" sessions for inductees who come into the program late;
- Teacher scholars should make appointments with their inductees before making visits;
- The Teacher Appraisal System should not be used for inductees and veteran teachers with the same strictness;
- The teacher scholars indicated that they should not be responsible for assessing inductees when the S.B. 994 is fully implemented. This will help protect the good and supportive intentions of the scholars' role so that the inductees can feel comfortable working with them. One member of the advisory committee further emphasized the need to keep the program separate from the assessment process;
- Principals should show more enthusiastic support for the program;
- Personnel department staff, who go out of the District to recruit new teachers, should avoid making empty promises or paint too rosy pictures of the District in order to win over teachers;
- If there were to be an adequate number of teacher scholars, it might be ideal to match them to the levels (i. e. elementary and secondary) based on the level they have taught;

- Inductees should be assigned to schools and classes where there are better opportunities for success;

- Inductees should not be assigned to any "major duties" during the induction year.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This report does not provide much discussion of the impact of the program on the District's retention rate of the inductees. There are two reasons for this. First, the retention data on the entry-level teachers for the past few years and that of the 1988-89 school year are currently not available for incorporation into the report. Furthermore, the researcher believes that the effectiveness of the program should not be determined by the overall retention rate since it is an inefficient and a questionable outcome measure. Clearly, not all of the inductees have what it takes to be effective teachers in the teaching profession. The first few years of one's entry into the teaching profession, therefore, provide a natural sieving mechanism for weeding out the non-promising teachers, who are destined to drop out, sooner or later. However, as has been emphasized by Hulin-Austin (1986), "*clearly some [entry-level teachers] who leave have the potential to become strong teachers if provided with adequate support.*"

In effect, it is important to mention that the purpose of the induction program is to provide adequate support for the potentially effective teachers to be more effective, and also find the school district attractive enough to make them want to stay, especially the most competent, since research indicates that "*those teachers who are the most academically able leave in the greatest numbers*" (Hulin-Austin, 1986). Certainly, it is virtually impossible to know how many of the 366 inductees have what it takes to be successful career teachers, and, consequently, determine the retentive effectiveness of the program. Besides, some entry level teachers are bound to leave no matter how perfect and effective the Teacher Induction Program happens to be.

Nevertheless, the organizational challenges of the initial year of the District's Teacher Induction Program were met considerably by the program staff, with the encouraging support of the District leadership. The program was, therefore, instrumental in improving inductee teaching effectiveness, morale, self-confidence, and adjustment to the instructional culture of the District.

As it is with all pilot programs, the feedback from program participants is not only the basis for correcting apparent weaknesses in the implementation process, but also the best method for optimizing the effectiveness of the program in achieving its goals and objectives. On the basis of a review of the implementation process and the extent to which the program goals and objectives were achieved, the researcher agrees with the observation of one of the advisory committee members that "*the HISD pilot program is on the right track, but is experiencing problems that should be considered normal for a first year*

effort." It is hoped that the findings of this evaluative study will also provide some field-testing data for the developers of the Texas Teacher Induction Program.

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